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Editorial

THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

The Young Men's Christian Association has become one of the most powerful and effective organizations in the world for the expression and cultivation of the spirit of Christianity. Its rise to strength, relatively slow in the first half of its existence, has in the last quarter-century been, especially in America, almost startlingly rapid. Prejudice has been overcome, the confidence alike of religious leaders and of men of wealth has been gained, splendid buildings have been erected, able men have been added to its staff, the field of its operations and the scope of its activities have been widened, until today it is known in every land, and is everywhere among the most notable and representative institutions of Christianity. It numbers among its officers, advocates, and supporters men of the highest eminence in political and financial life, and the sums willingly given to it every year for its work at home and abroad are reckoned not in thousands or hundreds of thousands, but in millions of dollars.

If we seek the explanation of the phenomenal success of this movement we shall find it in part at least in the following facts: In the first place, the association has had great leaders, men of ability, energy, and persistence, but above all, of faith. With breadth of vision and splendid courage, they have planned great things, and their faith has been justified by the results achieved. This has been true, moreover, not only of the men in places of the highest responsibility, but of the subordinate officers also. The association has chosen its colonels and captains, as well as its generals, with great wisdom, and has rigorously demanded that

they justify their appointment by achieved results. No supposedly superhuman and irresistible call to the ministry has sufficed to put a man into the service of the association, or to keep him there in the face of failure to bring things to pass.

In the second place, by ignoring those differences which separate the so-called evangelical denominations from one another the association has rallied to its support men of all denominations, and has succeeded in being not a divisive but a unifying force both in the home lands and in the Orient.

In the third place, it has increasingly emphasized the expression of Christianity in deed rather than its formulation in creed, and in pursuance of this policy has sought to do good in all ways and to all men. It has virtually said to all men who passed by its doors, "Whoever you are and whatever your need or creed, we are here to the extent of our ability to help you, and we invite you to join us in helping others in a like catholic spirit." So broad has been the platform, and so helpful has been its work that not only members of Protestant churches, but Catholics, Jews, members of no church, and adherents of the non-Christian religions of the East have given largely to the support of the association and have personally shared in its work. Notable among many instances of this kind is the case of Mr. Julius Rosenwald, a Jewish merchant of Chicago, who besides having given liberally for the work of the association in Chicago has recently offered to contribute \$25,000 for the erection of a building for men of the colored race in any city in which \$75,000 shall be given by others, a proposal of which five cities have already taken advantage. But scarcely less striking illustrations could be given of non-Christian men in India, China, and Japan, who, seeing the value of the association's work, have given liberally in proportion to their means for the support of this avowedly Christian institution.

But the very success of the association's work has now brought it face to face with a difficult and important question. The association had its birth not only within Christianity, but within the environment of distinctively orthodox and evangelical Christianity. It came into existence, moreover, in a time when the lines of discrimination, not only between Christianity and other religions, but

between evangelical Christian churches and all other Christian bodies, were sharply drawn. It is still somewhat surprising that a Hebrew or a Confucianist should give money for the promotion of a Christian association. But it would have been far more so when the association came into being, and in those days the friendliness of Christian sects one to another, which commonly prevails today, would have seemed to many actual infidelity to sacred truth. To the tolerant spirit that prevails today, the Young Men's Christian Association is in part indebted for its own prosperity, but it is also itself in no small part the cause of it. Its efforts to bring men together in common work have greatly helped them to forget their differences of opinion, losing sight of them in the mutual respect and liking which co-operation has produced.

Arising when it did, it was natural that the association should define its conditions of full membership in terms directly or indirectly doctrinal. Having made the history which it has made, it is not less inevitable that it should now find itself confronted by the question whether it shall maintain that position, or, following the lines which it has made for itself, modify its conditions of membership to correspond to the spirit which has more and more controlled its administration.

The expedient of associate membership has done valuable service. But sooner or later some other status will have to be found for that large number of valued participants in its work whom the association has drawn to itself but who do not fulfil the conditions of membership as now defined. The association has chosen to be something more than a Christian sect, and cannot evade the results of its own success.

There are undoubtedly difficulties in the way of substituting, as the condition of full membership in the association, any purely personal test, whether of creed or character, for the test of membership in an evangelical church, which has hitherto prevailed in the associations of this country. The impersonal test has undoubtedly contributed greatly to making the association a unifying instead of a divisive force. This advantage it can scarcely afford to forego. For we cannot but regard it as undesirable that this great body should cease to be the powerful unifying force in Christendom

which it has hitherto been, becoming in effect another competing church alongside of the Catholic and Presbyterian and Methodist churches that we already have. Undoubtedly, also, any proposition so to modify the constitution of the association as to give full place and privilege to all Christians alike would necessitate a consideration of the problem, What should be done in reference to non-Christians who contribute to the treasury of the association, and who are actually engaged in its work? It may become necessary to give larger place to the principle of local freedom already introduced to some extent. But no difficulties in the way of bringing Christians of all local and ecclesiastical names into one organization, or of co-operating with men not Christian in name, however truly so in spirit, can long serve to justify the association in maintaining a platform narrower than its name, or putting upon that name a definition defensible only on the premises of a conception of Christianity itself indefensibly narrow.

The association has been a principal factor in creating the present trend toward harmony and co-operation of all the forces of Christendom. In all the world it is today the most outstanding practical expression of the unity of Christendom and of the supremacy of character over formulated creed. Unless it will undo its own work and become a force in the opposite direction, it must speedily find a way by which all men who sincerely honor the name of Christ and desire to have a share in the realization of his ideals can work together in the association on equal terms. This is as clearly its duty today as was the inclusion of the members of all evangelical churches a century ago.